

A FEW DAYS AFTER URIAL OF THE PUNJAB

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The Urial of the Punjab (*Ovis vignei punjabensis*) is to be found in several localities, readily accessible to the sportsman in need of a few days holiday, and the pursuit of this handsome variety of the wild sheep of Asia can afford excellent sport and can, at the same time, furnish a handsome trophy—as an addition to the collection of heads of Indian large game.

Early in December 1920, the writer was able to avail himself of a few days' leave for a much coveted shoot in the Kala Chitta Range; and, at the same time, to see something of the wonders of the ancient city of Taxila, now under excavation by the Archæological Department of the Government of India.

On the way to Taxila, the motor car was stopped in a deep cutting above which is an obelisk erected to the memory of General John Nicholson. It occupies a fine commanding position and is visible for many miles. In the cutting on one side of the road is a fountain for drinking water and opposite to it are stone slabs, inscribed in English and Urdu, to the memory of the famous soldier. Proceeding along the Peshawar road, and turning off past the Railway Station of Taxila, the car took me to within half a mile of a large stupa the masonry work of which is of three kinds, dating to different periods, the earliest being about 300 B.C. Some of the stucco figures on this stupa are still in fair preservation. From this place, by a drive of some three miles, a visit was made to a monastery excavated out of the hill side. These buildings were, at the time of my visit, the most interesting and in the best preservation of all those hitherto exposed to view. The small carved figures surrounding the pedestals of some of the sculptures are very grotesque though wonderful in execution, illustrating in a most amusing way the strenuous efforts of men, monkeys, elephants, camels, oxen and other animals, in supporting the structure. Many of the sculptures are very beautiful with marked Grecian features.

Others of the widely scattered excavated buildings were seen, as also the extensive excavation, then under progress and by now no doubt greatly advanced, by which a whole city is being laid bare. The main street is about twenty-five feet wide, the side streets being some ten to fifteen feet in width and at right angles to the main road of the city. The rooms of the houses strike one as extraordinarily small. The earthenware pipes by which the city received its water-supply can be seen, much as they existed 2000 years ago. But all this is not urial shikar, and those of our readers who have seen these wonderful ruins at a later period of their exposure to modern eyes, and have also for reference a copy of Sir John Marshall's most interesting and informing handbook

concerning this ancient city, will rapidly pass by these few very inadequate notes regarding it.

On arrival at the small wayside railway station, from which my shooting ground was not far distant, I was greeted by the news that on the previous evening dacoits—probably trans-Indus Pathans—had raided the railway station. The station buildings, including the quarters of the station master and his assistant, were seen to be completely gutted. The assistant was seated amidst the charred remains of furniture, busily ticking away at his telegraph instrument. The dacoits, having completed the work of collecting everything of any value to themselves, had piled all the furniture, drenched it with kerosine oil, and set the place on fire. The women of the two households had been obliged to make over all their gold and silver ornaments, but had not been otherwise molested. The old station master had received a punch in the chest from the butt end of a pistol.

The place was full of police, and I was escorted to the small bungalow, situated on rising ground some three hundred yards away, where I was to pass the night. When the gang, which consisted of only three or four men, was busy on the railway premises, one of their number went to this bungalow, occupied that afternoon by an Indian official who was travelling, on transfer, with his family. The young ruffian—he was said to be only about eighteen years of age—entered into amicable conversation with the official, and having learned all he could enquired whether a pistol was carried. The reply being in the negative he promptly produced his own weapon. Having obtained a large sum of money and all the ornaments of the women, he brutally shot the unfortunate man in three places, and made his way back to his companions. All this took place in broad daylight, the setting sun going down on the blazing buildings. The blood of the victim was fresh on the whitewashed walls, the plaster of which was scarred by bullets. Fortunate for me that I had not arrived twenty-four hours earlier: weapons in locked cases are not of much avail against the sudden appearance of a determined ruffian armed with a revolver. This gang was not, I believe, brought to book on this occasion; but met with just deserts at a later period in consequence of further murderous outrages in the Attock District.

The next day an early start was made. The camp was found ready pitched at the foot of the hills, and two local shikaris, father and son, produced the usual assortment of chits. In the afternoon the rifle—375—had to be tried at various distances, as a new batch of cartridges loaded with a—to me—new kind of powder (Moddite) had to be brought into use. It was found that the hundred yards sight was good for any distance up to 250 yards and more. This had been found to be the case with other cartridges in many parts of the hills and plains, especially with cartridges of foreign manufacture. Small bore rifles are mostly considerably over-sighted. Moddite proved quite satisfactory, but it is best to try and keep to one kind of powder and one maker. Every new batch of cartridges should, however, be tested with a few trial shots.

Leaving camp early next morning half-an-hour's walking found us—myself, the two *shikaris*, and a tiffin cooly—working along the lower slopes of the rocky and scrub-covered hills. Soon after daybreak—the rifle sights were as yet scarcely visible—a hissing sort of whistle, the alarm note of the urial, drew our attention to a couple of rams with horns of about 20 to 25 inches. They were above us and soon made off uphill.

After that first view of game, until leaving the hills at four in the afternoon, we were seldom out of sight of and must have seen over a hundred animals. Of all these, many of course being ewes, only about half a dozen had good heads: by which I mean horns of well over 30 inches. It was a great pleasure to watch these handsome game-like sheep with their reddish brown coats, dark saddle backs, and long beards. Unfortunately the rutting season was past, so those exciting battles between the rams could not be watched.

At one time, early in the day, I was within sixty yards of a fine fat fellow with fair horns. He was standing on his hind legs feeding on the leaves of a thorny tree. It was interesting to watch him, and those of his companions who were visible among the scattered thorn and privet bushes of the ravine. Suddenly they took alarm and galloped off up the opposite hill side. A slant of wind no doubt. Such a stampede! A number of them stood on a spur and gazed in our direction, presenting quite a small forest of horns. They were only a hundred yards away and stared for quite a long time.

About twelve o'clock a halt for 'lunch' was made. Packing up was nearly done when the old *shikari* hastily signalled to me. A number of urial were coming up the slope from the valley below and would soon top the ridge to our side. Almost before the rifle could be got ready the first comers arrived amid much clattering of stones. Several sheep of both sexes appeared, paused to stare, and dashed off up the ravine. Then came a ram with horns of massive appearance. Evidently he was the owner of a fine head. He halted exactly where the other animals had paused and a quickly-sighted right shoulder shot at 120 yards dropped him where he stood. This was a somewhat fortunate shot, as my right eye is not in class A 1, but for very quick shooting it must needs be trusted. A great aid to quick aim is a tin funnel, fitted over the backsight, by means of which it is in constant shadow and all glare cut off. This was the best head of the trip, and the owner of it was named '*Itifak*' on account of his chance appearance on the scene. The horns presented almost a perfect circle, the tips touching the hair of the cheek bones. Right horn $34\frac{1}{2}$ inches, left 33 inches, the circumference at the base being $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The beard was mostly white and the photograph taken was an excellent one.

After this, within half an hour, another good head should have been secured. The sun being in my eyes, and the beast in shadow, a miss was scored over the top of his back. Perhaps, also, I was a bit too hurried as the urial were on the move. One must sometimes make excuses for such happenings.

During the past few days there had been a very keen wind and I

must at some time have exposed myself without being aware of it. All day there had been a feeling of being chilled and this, in spite of a warm vest, flannel shirt, cardigan waistcoat and puttoo coat! A rising temperature and aching legs warned me to be off to camp which was reached about five o'clock. Suitable treatment enabled me to shake off the threatened attack of fever, so fears of the shoot being cut short proved unfounded. In the evening the younger *shikari* brought me a pigeon, minus its head, which I identified as the Indian Stock Dove. He had killed it with a stone. A number of these birds were round about camp, also some coveys of chukor.

Next morning all the aches and pains were gone and a start was made by seven o'clock. A bitterly cold wind was blowing from the north, where snow-covered hills could be seen in the far distance. By half-past eight four rams, all about 25 inches, were seen and after that until past midday, nothing but one small ram and some ewes. Probably most of the animals were sheltering among the bushes and in the ravines. Gradually we made our way to the highest part of this portion of the range, where there is a white rock called 'Chitta'. The whole range bears the name of Kala Chitta. The old *shikari* says there is a black rock at the other end of this range of hills, hence the name: may be so. Soon after leaving 'Chitta' some urial were sighted far below, down the slopes of a wooded ravine, and the telescope disclosed that the gentleman of the party was a white-bearded old fellow the possessor of what seemed to be a perfect head of 32 or 33 inches. The line of approach was down the reverse side of a very rocky and precipitous ridge, and we eventually found ourselves a bit above the patriarch who was on the opposite ridge, about 200 yards away, and partly hidden by a bush. Our descent of the hill had not been entirely noiseless and the animals were evidently on the alert. There was no time to be lost, so a sitting position was quickly gained under cover of a small rock. The shot went over or else the beast was killed, as he instantly disappeared: but I knew it must have been a miss. The strenuous climb down had made me shaky. After going to see whether, by any chance, the animal had been hit, we rested for a while and a much-needed meal was discussed. The next move was to work across the neighbouring ravine to another ridge. From there the keen-eyed *shikari* drew attention to a white speck far up the hill and the telescope disclosed to view another patriarch, quite possibly the same beast recently missed. He was a long way off in a small open space among the shrubs with which the hill side just there was thickly covered. Viewed through the telescope he made a handsome picture. He was lying down with head erect, facing exactly towards me, his horns forming a perfect circle on either side while his long white beard was very conspicuous. It was this patch of white among the green which gave him away: a younger animal, with a black beard, would probably have escaped notice.

Leaving a man on the watch and giving him a whistle, we recrossed the ravine to make our way up the reverse side of the spur to that on which the former animal had stood when I missed him.

Then one of the men was sent higher up to disturb the ram, as it was hopeless to attempt to get near him where he lay. The *shikari* and I also climbed higher up to a place where the valley was fairly clear of bushes. No warning whistle came to us from below, but we had hardly got there, and I had only just selected a place on the steep hill side on which to sit, when a clatter of stones announced an animal travelling at speed and a ewe was seen to cross the bed of the ravine and make her way diagonally across the opposite slope of the hill. This gave the probable line of retreat for the remainder. Soon some other ewes appeared and then the ancient one. He crossed the *nala* out of sight, going fast, but halted—a fatal pause—in an open space on the opposite side of the valley. A good and quick shot from the left shoulder took him at 200 yards through his right shoulder. Stone dead, he slithered down the slope until fetched up by a small shrub. So much was he dead mutton that he could not be *hallaed*. He proved to be a very old animal, several teeth gone, hair turning white on shoulders and rump while his beard was quite white. The saddle on his back was very clearly marked. Horns 31 inches only. They had seemed bigger than that. However he was a fine trophy and well deserved. ‘*Dada*’ was the quite appropriate name given to him by the men.

The third day new ground was tried and many urial were seen. Early in the morning a good beast was missed. The approach was not too easy: it was necessary to crawl some distance and be careful to keep in shadow of bushes as no animals have more keen eyesight than the ever-watchful wild sheep. The twigs of green privet stuck in my sun topee enabled a sitting position by side of a bush to be slowly gained. Alas! I had omitted the morning routine of wiping out the oiled barrel and a high miss was the inevitable result—the ram gave no second chance. On the shot being fired two other rams ran back towards me and walked across our front at close range, without detecting us, as we crouched crouched motionless admiring their stately paces. The next valley was bare of cover, containing only a few small gatherings of sheep with no shootable ram among them. A long climb took us to a high ridge, on the other side of which was a deep and precipitous ravine. Urial could be seen some distance away; but the wind was wrong, and the only thing to do was to send a man round and above to give them his wind and so enable the telescope and field glasses to get to work. This was done and from where merely a few animals lying down had been seen a long procession of sheep now came into view. There were some fair heads in this large flock of nearly a hundred animals, but none of outstanding size. One of the ewes was obviously a tame sheep strayed who now ran bleating loudly with her wild sisters. Slowly following the long procession—the ‘*Rissala*’ the men called it—appeared two splendid looking rams. Evidently but little alarmed, they branched off by themselves and lay down, out of shot, under a thorny tree. After a wait of over an hour some urial came from below and, going upwards, climbed towards the big fellows who had meanwhile got up and, with frequent halts, were coming along towards them and so nearer to us. When the lower party, slowly

pacing, suddenly caught sight of the heads of the veterans, or, perhaps, merely heard the slight noise of their movement, they got a great scare and wildly bolted in the opposite direction. The two old gentlemen came quietly on. Foolishly becoming nervous as to the distance, which, owing to the deep and wide intervening ravine was not easy to judge, I put up the 200 yards lead and twice went over the back of the larger one of the pair. There was not much to choose between them. He turned uphill, and the third shot, aimed much lower, got him through the body and pulled him up short; a fourth bullet broke his neck. The man up the hill came flying down, at such a pace as only these hill men can attain, his knife glittering in the rays of the sun, now getting low in the sky, and on reaching the ram called out that he was dead. '*Hallah karo, Hallah karo*' yelled the three men with me and this was done amid great reverberating shouts of '*Allaho Akbar*' from our side. This patriarch also had an almost wholly white beard. His horns were 32 inches being very symmetrical and massive. The tips were worn and not broken. He was ironically named the '*Sipah Salah*' on account of his having taken up a strategic position, with his 'Adjutant-General' in attendance. This was the suggestion of the man added to our party this day and who had done some military service.

We were far afield, camp was not reached until dark and the unfortunate '*Sipah Salah*' was pronounced by the village mullah to be unlawful meat as he had no breath in him when *halled*. This was certainly the case as his neck was broken: but if blood flows that should suffice. However the strict Muhammadans of this part of the country will not allow even that small latitude in the matter. This mullah had a fine voice and it was most impressive to hear his sonorous call to prayers ringing out over the country side, especially in the early hours of the coming day.

This long day's work over the knife-edged rocks and rough stony hills completely finished the new rope soles with which the shoot was commenced. I took to the *chapl* of the country after this, and also when in the Salt Range where the going is even worse than in the Kala Chitta Hills.

There was said to be an albino ram in this part of the range, 'white as your handkerchief' the shikari described him. Much to my regret he was not seen. On the way back to camp that day we came down a rocky ravine which somewhat reminded me of an immense gorge lately seen in a side valley of the Sutlej River, far up on the Tibet border, where huge pieces of the hill side had been displaced by a recent earthquake: so said the local people. Telling the men of this they enquired the cause of earthquakes which was explained to best of my ability. I was then informed that the mullah's explanation was that a big bull supported the earth on his horns, one horn at a time, and the earthquake occurred when he got tired, which was at very long intervals, and had to change the weight from one horn to the other! Perhaps the jovial fellows were pulling my leg.

The fourth day of this most enjoyable outing was a day of misses; very suitably, *four* misses! A fine ram was found at about

eleven o'clock and missed at some 220 yards: a down hill shot. Later on a real good head was seen. After a long stalk, very skilfully conducted by the younger *shikari*—the old man was bowled over by raging toothache—a shot was obtained on the opposite side of a ravine, at a beast which I took to be the animal we were after. The lad said I went over him. Just after firing this shot there was a slight noise behind us and there were half a dozen rams with *the* big one among them! They were watching curiously, wondering no doubt why we were crawling about, and made off rapidly to quickly disappear among the many rocks and bushes. The big ram was not again seen. Much ground was covered and yet another miss at a good ram. Still over the top says the shikari. On the way to camp the remains of an urial, evidently killed some days previously by a panther, were found. Doubtless the few panthers which inhabit these hills take full toll of these wild sheep and are seldom in want of a meal.

Discouraged by want of success we slowly picked our way by descending paths. The bearer of a shootable head was spied far down the hill and the stalk resulted in yet another miss! my 'little Mary' was somewhat uneasy and may be that affected my shooting during this day. A number of good heads had been seen; the best of them about 33 inches.

It seems however, that the real reason why there was no success in that day's shikar was, that we met an old woman on leaving the village in the morning; and one of the coolies saw a hare. With two such bad omens how was it possible for the rifle to hit anything? Had a jackal been seen matters would have been entirely different! In Kashmir also it is considered very unlucky if women are met when men are setting out for shikar.

On the last morning, the fifth day of the shoot, a fox was seen; not good, but later on a jackal crossed our path and this counteracted the former malign influence so we soon sighted urial. The stalk was not difficult as there was an icy wind and the animals were all sheltering from it in a ravine. The only ram of any size proved to be certainly under 30 inches. A stone thrown down the hill side moved these animals and also some others which had been lying up, unseen, on our side of the ravine. They soon came into view. One ram appeared to bear a good head and the shot, taken tail on at 120 yards, took him at the place aimed at, the centre of the left buttock, travelling forward to the chest, and he only moved a couple of yards. This time the meat was 'lawful'; very much so quite judging by the shambles the men made of the place. An old beast he was, turning grey as to beard, but not, a 'patriarch'. His horns were very much broken at the tips, and also at the bend, probably in fighting, and as he was evidently something of a bruiser they named him '*Pahlwan*'.

Four heads 34½", 33", 32" and 30" had been obtained, enough indeed, and no more could be shot. The old shikari, who had hunted urial of these hills for thirty years, told me he only once saw a head of 36 inches, and that in 1918. Anything of 32 inches and over is quite good, and I was fortunate in the heads I secured. Protection appears to have come into force about twenty years ago, and to

have been much needed, as urial were becoming scarce. The men said there was a good deal of poaching going on in some parts, also grazing of cattle and goats, so disturbing to the sheep, but that the forest guards were powerless in the matter. That can be readily imagined. The people of these parts are not of the most law-abiding in the land. On a later occasion I again visited this locality but saw no heads better than that of 'Pahlwan'; perhaps the sheep had moved ground, or the grey-beards been shot by other sportsmen.

The urial of the Salt Range are smaller animals than those of the Kala Chitta Hills both as to bulk of body and size of horns. I saw nothing there over 26 inches. Probably the more arid nature of the country and the inferior feeding has something to do with the matter. Animals were not plentiful and as strict protection as it is possible to attain seemed indicated, in the block I was shooting in at any rate, and probably in the other blocks as well. This was in 1923. Chinkara with heads running to 13 inches are to be found in the Salt Range and in some places chukor, see-see, and grey partridges are plentiful. The walking is atrocious.

On my way from camp to railway station, the old *shikari* accompanying me as I was taking him to a doctor who would extract the offending tooth,—a chinkara with horns $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length afforded a somewhat difficult stalk which ended in a successful shot at about 180 yards. A few others were seen, all of them very wild, and so the blackened ruins of the station were gained by sun down and this most pleasant and successful outing came to an end.

My train was due to leave at 4 a.m., and I had a somewhat restless night on the station platform, one of my awakenings being due to the rumbling arrival of a bullock cart bringing the coffin containing the mortal remains of the unfortunate victim of the dacoity. He had died that morning and his body was being conveyed to his native place in the same train by which I was to travel, a coincidence which occasioned sundry sober reflections as to what 'might have been.'